

Thu 10/8/2015 12:26 PM

Suhag Shukla [suhag@hafsite.org](mailto:suhag@hafsite.org)

Hindu American Submission of Additional Comments to Latest Draft of History-Social Science Frameworks 10/9/2015

Dear Dr. Adams and Members of the Instructional Quality Commission,

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) would like to submit the comments on the latest draft of the history-social science frameworks.

First off, we commend the commission's hard work, particularly the writing team, in incorporating thousands of comments into the latest revision. We have seen some significant improvements in the way Hinduism is covered, and for that, we are appreciative.

There are still a number of concerns, however, and we are troubled that the commission did not incorporate the feedback of scholars and HAF on some important issues related to world and U.S. history. We are submitting our comments in the attached three spreadsheets (pdf), with suggested rewording in *italics*, as well as some primary source evidence on some of the points made.

Broadly speaking, our comments hit upon five themes, with accuracy as an underlying factor for all of them. These include 1) relaying uncertainty on topics that are still evolving areas of study; 2) avoiding oversimplification in describing complex religious beliefs; 3) removing inconsistencies in the materials presented; 4) wording passages so as to not adversely reflect on a particular community or people; and 5) including the contributions of various ethnic and national groups for an inclusive depiction of California and U.S. history.

### **Relaying Uncertainty and Accuracy**

In the grade 6 narrative, the ancient India section is improved. However, there are some descriptions that need to be revised to fit historical accuracy. In line 778 (and repeating in line 797), the Indus-Saraswati civilization is referred to as the Harappan civilization. While this is not inaccurate, archaeologists and historians now refer to it as Indus-Saraswati. Secondly, the issues over the origins of the Vedic era continue to linger, and as our attached comments seek to highlight, it would be important for the commission to note that the origins of Vedic society and the timeframe of the Vedic period are still highly contested and the area a continually evolving topic of research.

### **Avoiding Oversimplification and Accuracy**

In grade 6, lines 827-863, the inclusion of key concepts such as karma and dharma is an important step towards students' understanding of Hinduism. However, the oversimplification of these rather complex concepts render them inaccurate. Indeed, both scholars and theologians have warned that Americans' woeful level of religious illiteracy, both in terms of misunderstanding and ignorance, damages not only America's

relationship to other nations, but Americans' relationships with one another and devastatingly, to America's greatest strength, its democracy. We urge the commission to ensure that core concepts be explained thoroughly and that specific examples be provided, where appropriate, to ensure students' grasp of the subject matter.

### **Removing Inconsistencies**

In grade 6, lines 827-829, where the beginnings and basic beliefs of Hinduism are first introduced, reference Brahmins as taking over certain roles and credit them for expounding upon fundamental religious concepts like Brahman. First, most scholars have concluded that societal roles, including priest functions, were far more fluid and organic during the Vedic age. Moreover, sages are credited with having been the composers of the Vedas. Sages, by convention and by vows taken, are considered to have relinquished any social classifications and familial relationships. In lines 879-881, the previous effort made in distinguishing varnas from jatis, an important distinction in the development of Indian society, is undercut by the use of the terms "pyramid" and "hierarchy," which inaccurately describe what the varnas were. We urge the commission to strike this sentence for accuracy, and to keep consistent with the previous sentences in the passage.

### **Avoiding Adverse Reflection**

Additionally, in grade 7, lines 1544-45 are written in a way we believe contravenes the spirit of state [Education Code sections 51501 and 60044](#), which "prohibit the State Board of Education and local school boards from adopting any instructional material for use in schools which contains any matter reflecting adversely upon persons because of their race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, handicap, or occupation." The [Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content](#) have further clarified that to avoid "adverse reflection," "No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."

As we have noted in our previous comments, and are suggesting in our amended comments (which are affirmed by religion scholars and historians of India and South Asia), there is a much better way to discuss the growth of a religion without adversely reflecting upon another. We strongly urge the commission to revise the wording of this section, as we believe the current wording is not only representative of adverse reflection, but inaccurate as well.

### **Inclusivity**

We have also included comments in the K-5 framework, which we hope will lead to a more inclusive and accurate depiction of the contribution of Indian-Americans, regardless of their religious background, to California.

We are confident that the commission will take into account vetted scholarship and revise the narrative accordingly.

Sincerely,

Murali Balaji, Ph.D  
Director of Education and Curriculum Reform  
Hindu American Foundation  
Former professor, Media Studies, Temple University  
Former chair, Mass Communications Department, Lincoln University  
Co-editor, *Desi Rap* (Lexington Books, 2008)  
Co-editor, *Global Masculinities and Manhood* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008)

Samir Kalra, Esq.  
Senior Director/Human Rights Fellow  
Hindu American Foundation

Suhag A. Shukla, Esq.  
Executive Director/Legal Counsel  
Hindu American Foundation

Attachments:

1. Three spreadsheets - HAF's Submission for K-5, 6-8, and 9-12
2. Caste: Fission and Fusion by Robert L. Hardgrave
3. Passages from *My Mother India* by Dalip Singh Saund
4. Passages from *Congressman from India* by Dalip Singh Saund
5. The Origin of Indians: What our gene are telling us by Shreenath Perur
6. Genetic Evidence of Early Human Migrations in the Indian Ocean Region Disproves Aryan Migration/Invasion Theories by Lavanya Vemsani
7. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the Aryan Invasions and the Emergence of the Caste System in India by Arvind Sharma
8. The Passion of Paul Hacker by Joydeep Bagchee and Vishwa Adluri

--

Suhag A. Shukla, Esq.  
Executive Director and Legal Counsel  
910 17th St NW, Suite 316  
Washington DC 20006-2636  
Direct Line: [651.248.3883](tel:651.248.3883)  
Telephone: [202.223.8222](tel:202.223.8222)  
Fax: [202.223.8004](tel:202.223.8004)